

**A Technical Assistance Manual
of the Missouri Long-Term Care
Ombudsman Program**

***How to
Organize
and Direct
an Effective
Resident
Council***

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Introduction

Since the early 1960's, experts on institutional living have expressed concern about the deterioration that results when long-term care residents do not have opportunities for continuing meaningful activities, and when they are not encouraged to maintain independence and self-determination.

Research has shown that maintaining the right to self-determination is beneficial not only to residents, but also to caregivers.

Elaine Brody of the University of Southern California Gerontology Center, found that "when residents are encouraged in maintaining a sense of autonomy and control over their own life, there is less mental confusion and physical dependency and, hence, less need for care by others."

Dr. P.W. Thompson of the Menninger Foundation

Geriatric Center further reinforces the beliefs of other experts when he says that "the most helpful assistance is the kind which recognizes the need to experience, as much as possible and for as long as possible,

feelings of mastery and influence. Residents need to use, to exercise and to demonstrate whatever talents, intelligence, knowledge, or

skills they have. They need to mix with people with whom they can experience the pleasure and the power which comes from sharing, loving, discussing, and even arguing."

The resident council is an organization which provides a form of self-government within the long-term care setting. It provides a forum for residents to exercise self-determination and opportunities to use their talents and wisdom to create and help maintain the quality of environment so necessary for healthy institutional living.

Despite the well-accepted, obvious benefits and advantages of resident councils, difficulties in establishing and maintaining effective councils occur. It is apparent that many existing resident councils are not being cultivated to their fullest potential.

This technical assistance manual is based on the philosophy that residents of long-term care facilities should be involved to the greatest degree possible in making the decisions that affect their lives.

Working with resident councils requires special skills and knowledge. The purpose of this manual is to increase understanding of the functions and benefits of resident councils.

The manual also includes information and practical assistance to help residents and staff organize and develop their

councils to be active and strong.

Long-Term Care Ombudsmen are committed to the same goals and objectives as those of resident councils, i.e. promoting and protecting the self-determination of residents, empowering residents to speak for themselves, providing opportunities for residents to speak on the issues that concern them, assisting residents in resolving problems, etc.

Throughout the history of Missouri's LTC Ombudsman Program, volunteers have been trained in the philosophy and function of resident councils. Ombudsmen are encouraged to support and be involved in the councils of the facilities they serve.

The inspiration and motivation for writing this manual came from the many years of guiding these ombudsmen in their efforts to help residents and others maintain effective resident councils.

While training volunteer ombudsmen to respond to requests for help with resident councils, the ombudsman program staff have collected a vast amount of information and experience.

This manual presents this knowledge in an organized and easy-to-use format for those seeking to establish and maintain more effective resident councils.

The manual covers the philosophy, history, functions, and current level of acceptance of resident councils. The many ways of organizing resident councils are included with a discussion of the characteristics of each.

The manual stresses throughout that councils should be individualized to reflect the specific needs of the residents they serve. Various kinds and levels of leadership are discussed with an emphasis on the different roles and characteristics required of the facility staff who work with resident councils.

Suggestions are made for conducting effective meetings and keeping accurate records of the council's actions as well as distributing minutes.

In addition to providing information for those organizing new councils, this manual offers ways to evaluate and improve existing councils.

Resident council participants are bound to encounter difficulties in establishing and maintaining an effective council. This manual discusses potential problems and possible solutions.

Readers will not find the answers to all their questions; however, if implemented, the basic principles presented in this manual will be helpful to persons interested in organizing and directing an effective resident council.

Emmelene W. Kerr,
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What is a Resident Council?

Resident councils are organized, self-governing, decision-making groups of long-term care residents meeting regularly to voice their needs and concerns and to have input into the activities, policies, and issues affecting their lives in the facility. Through a resident council, residents can positively impact their facility, making it a reflection of their preferences and values.

Because a successful council meets the needs of the residents it serves, there is no typical resident council. Some have many members attending meetings on a regular basis. Others have only a few “representatives” attending meetings.

Likewise, some councils are highly organized, while others function in an informal manner. Some are led by residents, and others are led by facility staff or volunteers. Whatever the structure of a resident council, the primary characteristics must be:

- that it provides a forum for residents to express themselves; and
- that it reflects and meets the needs of the residents it serves.

Examples of how resident councils work include:

- In one facility a full activity calendar was displayed, but many of the activities never took place. The resident council met and evaluated the entire program. Ideas and opinions were solicited, helping to assure that staff would be focusing on programs of interest to the residents. To ensure that the activity program continued to improve and meet the residents’ needs, an activities committee was formed to work with the activity director.

The residents’ satisfaction and attendance increased.

A resident council is essential to giving residents input into their daily life in a facility. It can give residents a sense of purpose and increase life satisfaction.

- In another facility, residents were dissatisfied with how they were treated when another resident died. They complained to their ombudsman that when it was time to take a body to the mortuary, they were all

“herded” into an area where they could not see the process. The council was able to give residents a comfortable place to discuss this issue. A “Time of Remembrance” was instituted as a solution. When a resident died, those remaining in the facility were given a chance to gather and offer a prayer, or just have a moment of silence. A monthly memorial service was held to remember all residents who had died in that month.

- In a third facility, food complaints were at an all time high. There were so many problems that the residents took their concerns about the food to the resident council. A plan was drawn up to have the food service director meet with a few residents to look for solutions. It took some time and patience on both sides, but the food has improved.

Residents can have a positive influence on the way life is organized in the facility. As they take advantage of opportunities to have influence, the resident council will grow and change.

ADVOCACY TIP:

Since it is a resident council, the residents need to be as much in control of the planning and running of the meeting as possible. A staff person or volunteer would give only as much assistance as the residents needed or requested.

History of the Resident Council

Leaders and innovators in the long-term care field have been advocating for resident self-government for over 40 years. So, while involving long-term care residents in decision making is not a new idea, resident councils do not have a long history.

The 1960's were a time of increased awareness of conditions in long-term care facilities and the concerns of residents who lived there. In response to this heightened awareness, many advocacy organizations formed to address long-term care issues. It was during this time that resident councils started emerging and their value was recognized as a way to resolve some resident concerns.

As resident rights began being enacted into law, the importance of involving residents in the life of the facility repeatedly appeared on lists of rights. Advocacy groups saw resident councils a way to

improve resident involvement. In 1972, the Nursing Home Residents' Advisory Council in Minnesota, now known as the Advocacy Center for Long-Term Care, became the first group to offer assistance in forming resident councils. Similar groups were established in Washington and New York.

During the 1960's and 1970's, greater awareness of the conditions inside long-term care facilities motivated advocacy groups to address nursing home issues and problems.

Today, recognition of the importance of resident councils has spread to most states. Colorado, Illinois, New York, and Oklahoma have adopted laws requiring each facility to have a resident council. Other states include the right to

have a council in their state resident rights statutes. Missouri supports resident councils through regulation 19 CSR 30-88.010(19), which states: "...Residents shall be informed of and provided a viable format for recommending changes in policy and services..." Although not specifically required by law, the resident council can be a tool for implementing this regulation.

It is expected that each resident in Missouri who wants to be involved in a resident council will be allowed to do so.

Recognition of the importance of resident councils has also spread to provider organizations such as the American Association of Homes for the Aging and the American Health Care Association. Likewise, Long-Term Care Ombudsman programs have long been staunch supporters of resident councils.

Although the topic of resident self-government is not dealt with specifically in the federal nursing home reform legislation, commonly known as OBRA '87, residents residing in certified facilities are guaranteed the right to meet together for whatever purpose they choose. This includes having a resident council.

ADVOCACY TIP:

If you are a new council facilitator or council officer, talk with the administrator, activity coordinator and social service director about the history of the resident council in your facility. This will help you understand what has been done in the past and allow you to avoid the pitfalls that have been encountered previously.

Why Have a Resident Council?

Many of our values are deeply rooted in the principle of self-determination. We highly regard our right to pursue happiness, speak for ourselves, and make the laws by which we are governed. These values do not change just because we move into a long-term care facility.

An effective resident council can do many things for residents. Consider the following points:

- **Involved residents are healthier.**

Professionals in many fields recognize that a feeling of being in control of one's life often translates into better physical and mental health. Effective councils help residents speak out, keeping negative emotions from turning inward.

Anger, frustration, or worry turned inward puts residents at a greater risk for depression, low self-esteem, lethargy, or just giving up.

Self-expression is more than an inalienable right, it is necessary to continued good health. It is the epitome of the principles of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, that are the foundation of our republic.

- **Resident Councils promote independence and personal growth.**

When residents feel dependent on others for their basic needs, they may fear retaliation from their caregivers if they

criticize or offer suggestions.

Councils promote resident friendships and mutual support networks that provide

residents greater comfort when speaking out.

Not only do resident councils provide an opportunity for new relationships, they provide new challenges and opportunities for personal growth and development. The

Professionals in the long-term care field recognize that the feeling of being in control of the major areas of one's life translates into better physical and mental health.

resident who was never involved in neighborhood groups or their children's school may now be able to take a leadership role for the first time.

- **Involved residents help the facility run more smoothly.**

Gossip and misinformation can spread quickly through a long-term care facility. When residents are involved in a council, they can be better informed.

When asked for input on the activities provided in the facility, residents are more likely to participate. Resident involvement can contribute to a better facility atmosphere, as well as increased satisfaction for both residents and staff.

- **Councils can identify and resolve problems in the early stages.**

Resident councils should be an important part of the facility's grievance procedure. In fact, research by the National Citizens' Coalition for Nursing Home Reform showed that many residents view their councils as the ideal system in which to solve problems within their facility.

- **The existence of a council reflects the facility's philosophy of care.**

The existence of a resident council in the facility makes a statement about the

philosophies guiding the care of people who live there. By providing a resident council and staff to work with it, the administration supports the belief that residents have the right to speak for themselves and influence their environment.

ADVOCACY TIP:

Several states have formed a State resident council organization. In some areas of the country, the nursing facilities have joined together and schedule quarterly city wide or area wide meetings for all the resident council Presidents. This allows for a sharing of information on common concerns.

Getting Started

Although not required by Missouri law, most facilities have some kind of resident group. Taking this into consideration, many readers of this book will be looking for ways to make the group as effective as it can be. Regardless of whether you are starting a new council or improving an existing one, the same basic principles apply to making it successful.

A critical key to an effective resident council is the attitude and philosophy of the caregivers. When the facility administrator recognizes the importance of providing self-governing groups, there will likely be little resistance to the establishment of the group. Additional support must come from other staff, including the nurses aides, who are convinced of the value of the

council and are committed to assisting residents in taking part.

When you have the support necessary to establish a council, working out the details and maintaining commitment from both the administration and the residents becomes the issue.

In developing an effective resident council, it is important to look at who is trying to establish the council. Often, it is a staff member who initiates the effort. If residents are not supportive of the idea, the effectiveness of the council will be limited. If, however, the idea comes from residents, there will likely be more support. Whatever the source of the inspiration for the group, it takes only one interested and committed person to get the ball rolling, but it takes many people working together to make the council successful.

As the facility staff and the residents work together to start or improve a council, the following steps should be taken:

1. Have a brainstorming session

Call a meeting of all persons interested in

It takes only one interested and committed person to get the ball rolling, but it takes many people working together to make the council successful.

organizing a resident council. This includes the administrator, staff, families, volunteers, and most importantly, all interested residents.

During the brainstorming session, the group needs to:

- discuss the value of a resident council for staff, residents, and the facility;
- review the information in this manual. Consult your local Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program for further assistance;
- explore and analyze possible staff resistance to a council and discuss staff roles and expectations;
- secure staff and administrative commitment to support a council;
- identify potential resident leadership;
- consider possible resident apathy or resistance and how to respond; and
- form a committee of four to six people to plan an exploratory meeting of all residents to discuss the establishment of a resident council.

Remember that during a brainstorming session, there are no bad ideas. It is important that everyone is allowed to voice their opinion.

2. Conduct an exploratory meeting

The committee should plan a meeting for all residents. A good strategy would be to schedule the meeting to coincide with a popular activity that a large number of residents would be expected to attend.

Unless there is a very capable resident, it may be necessary for a committed staff member to lead this meeting. The purpose of this meeting would be to:

- inform residents of the purposes and benefits of a council;
- share staff ideas and commitment to the project;
- give examples of how councils are effective in other facilities. Invite a member of a resident council from another facility to talk about his/her council;
- lead a short discussion to identify the concerns of the residents and ways the council could address them;
- take a vote to determine if there is interest in organizing a council; and
- if so, select a committee of four to six people (include residents, staff, and volunteers) to organize and plan the first meeting.

3. Conduct an organizational committee meeting

The work of this committee can probably be accomplished in two meetings. The remainder of this book provides the information necessary for this committee to perform its duties.

It is important for the administrator to show his/her support for the council at these meetings. This can be done either by a personal appearance or sending a letter to the committee. Once support is received, the organizational committee can establish some recommendations for basic structure

ADVOCACY TIP:

The same committee members may be willing to continue serving at each succeeding step in this process. The only difference at each step along the way is the purpose and goal of each committee.

fairly quickly. This includes:

- establishing the purpose and function of the council;
- establishing the organizational structure and leadership;
- establishing the role of facility staff in the council;
- determining resident needs and concerns that are appropriate for the council to address;
- selecting special projects the council could be involved in;
- determining when and how often to meet; and
- planning a meeting where all residents are invited to hear and vote on the recommendations of the committee.

After this process, the committee should have the basic components for writing bylaws by which the council will operate.

4. Implementing the plan

If residents vote to establish a resident council based on the

committee's recommendations, the only thing that remains is implementing the plans that have been made.

Creating and developing a resident council takes time. Be patient and recognize council successes, even the small ones.

While "big projects" are important and residents gain a sense of satisfaction from

involvement in such endeavors, building a cohesive group where people listen to each other with interest and respect is important. This takes time, and may be difficult, but your efforts will pay off in the end.

It will help to get your council off to a good start if early in the life of a council you are able to point to successes that are meaningful to a large number of residents. Some areas where a council might be successful include: a change in serving procedures assuring residents get hot coffee; establishing a committee that sends cards and letters to residents in the hospital; or conducting a get acquainted activity for new residents.

Staff Orientation

Staff and administration support is one of the most critical and important building blocks of an effective resident council.

Every staff member must be aware of the philosophy and need for a resident council, how it will function in the facility, and how they can be of assistance. Staff must be committed to the council if it is to operate effectively.

To accomplish these objectives, staff must have the chance to take part in organizing

A key element to the success of your resident council is staff understanding, support, and involvement.

the council in their facility. The staff need to be trained so they will know how best to assist and support the council. Various approaches can be used to do this. Two of the more common ones are:

- information on the council is systematically incorporated into other staff trainings, or
- in-service trainings can be designed specifically to equip staff to understand and support the resident council.

The need to orient staff on how the council can help assure a high quality of life in the facility should be kept in mind when planning inservice programs. Residents often suffer from feelings of powerlessness and lack of control over their lives. This can lead to depression. Participation in a resident council can alleviate these feelings by giving back some control. Staff must understand that their main role in the council is support and encouragement. The residents are in charge.

If you plan on incorporating the information on resident councils into other staff trainings, an excellent opportunity presents itself during the annual resident rights in-service required by Missouri law. At such an in-service, it could be pointed out how the council promotes and protects resident rights.

If the facility chooses to provide a specific staff training on resident councils, the following two in-service ideas, adapted from the “Resident Council Resource Kit” prepared by the Minnesota Advocacy Center for Long-Term Care, could be used.

Whatever approach is used, it is important that all staff have a clear understanding of the council and its role in the facility.

ADVOCACY TIP:

Information about the resident council should be included in new employee orientation, not just at in-services.

ADVOCACY TIP:

Staff need to send out the message loud and clear that this is the resident council and the residents are the ones in control. The only staff person who should be in attendance at each council meeting is the staff adviser. The main role of other staff members is to encourage resident participation by being cheerleaders for the organization and by seeing that residents receive assistance if needed to get to the meeting place at the scheduled time. Staff members wishing to address the council need to ask to be placed on the agenda. The council can also request that a specific staff member be present if they would have information pertaining to an issue the council plans to discuss.

Sample In-Service #1

Sensitivity to Residents' Situations

This exercise is designed to sensitize staff to residents' feelings of powerlessness, loss, and lack of choice.

Ask each staff member to complete the exercise on the following page. After each one has made their choices, conduct a discussion exploring how their life would change, what they would have to give up, and how they would feel about moving into the facility. During the discussion, remind staff that residents should be encouraged to:

- air grievances and suggestions;
- discuss concerns with staff, i.e. discussing menu preferences with the dietitian;
- participate in care planning; and
- get involved with the resident council.

Now have staff get in groups of 2, 3, or 4 people. These are now “roommates” and each group is to come up with one set of seven items to “keep.”

Follow exercise with discussion:

- How hard was this exercise?
- Did anyone have to give up something they really wanted to keep?
- Would they be compatible with their new roommates?

After discussing the exercise, ask participants how they can help residents with their adjustment to nursing home life and how they can return power and control to residents.

FANTASY EXERCISE

Imagine that you are an 80-year old person. Safety, social, nutrition and housekeeping needs are no longer being met in your present residence. You have some family, some close friends, and much the same likes and dislikes as you do at this age. You, your doctor, and others whose judgment you respect have come to think you need the help you could get living in a nursing home.

In this fantasy situation, pretend you must move into a facility and can keep only seven of the privileges listed here. Place a check mark in front of the seven which are most important TO YOU. If the most important things to your happiness are not listed, you may add two choices by writing them in the space marked "other". These will be included in your final list of seven.

- _____ The privilege of doing gainful activities daily, similar to what you did in your home or apartment.
- _____ The privilege of taking frequent trips, and visiting friends and family outside the facility.
- _____ The privilege of keeping pictures of your family and small, treasured mementos.
- _____ The privilege of bringing favorite pieces of furniture from your home or apartment.
- _____ The privilege of defining your own schedule, i.e. making noise, staying up late, not getting dressed in the morning, etc.
- _____ The privilege of entertaining friends in sufficient space and privacy.
- _____ The privilege of keeping and preparing food in any way you please.
- _____ The privilege of keeping a pet.
- _____ The privilege of monitoring your own health; to keep, take, or refuse medications.
- _____ The privilege of making totally independent decisions, with yourself and your close family and friends as the only people's opinions to consider.
- _____ The privilege of determining how you will spend your time: leisure, rest, work, alone, with others, etc.
- _____ The privilege of continuing relationships with friends who live in their own homes.
- _____ The privilege of having space and supplies to work on your hobbies.
- _____ The privilege of grieving for loss of home and independent living status.
- _____ The privilege of receiving considerate, respectful care, with your privacy and need for independence respected.
- _____ The privilege of living in an environment where it is okay to talk about and discuss your fears and feelings about aging, life, and death.

OTHER _____

Sample In-Service #2

Making Choices in Group Settings

An effective staff orientation should be based on exercises that help staff acquire a better understanding of the ways in which residents' lives are enhanced by involvement in groups. The following is a suggested training outline based on group involvement.

Introduction and Discussion

Begin by asking staff to list the groups or organizations they belong to and share briefly the purposes of these organizations. Continue by acquainting staff with the residents' method for making decisions and choices as a group.

Discuss the basic purposes and philosophy of resident councils. Point out that councils:

- are a form of self-determination;
- allow residents to take initiative and action for themselves;
- are the residents' own organization; and
- benefit administration and staff by providing a channel for two-way communication.

Ask your resident council president to attend and talk about the council. Ask him/her to explain council organization; current officers; the meeting schedule; council activities; and how staff can support the council.

If you do not yet have a council, invite an officer from another facility's council to attend or ask an interested staff person to review written material about resident councils and present it to the staff.

Stress the relationship between staff and the council, and discuss the importance of staff cooperation and support. Staff can show their support by:

- encouraging residents to express concerns and make suggestions at resident council meetings;
- attending council meetings when invited;
- assisting residents to and from meetings; and
- showing respect for the council and its work.

The resident council can be helpful to both residents and staff, by encouraging a working relationship between the two groups. Ask the staff, “What have residents been asking you to do differently?” and “What would you like residents to be more aware of?”

Role Playing

Use role plays to give examples of appropriate and typical exchanges between residents and staff during resident council meetings. This will illustrate the various roles staff may play with the council. The following examples may help:

- **Social Services**

The residents’ rights poster has not been displayed since the last remodeling project. Resident council requests posting of resident rights.

Social services director requests resident volunteers greet new residents.

- **Nursing Services**

Resident council requests explanation of doctor visitation schedules.

Director of Nursing explains policies for ordering and paying for medications.

- **Activities**

Resident council helps choose activities for monthly schedule.

Activity director requests volunteers to set up bowling activity.

- **Dietary**

Resident council would like more menu choices.

Dietitian discusses various menu plans that would have a broader appeal.

- **Administration**

Resident council asks for a change in the facility’s smoking policy.

Administrator explains current regulations and facility policy relating to smoking.

- **Laundry**

Resident council asks that a serious study be made to find ways to prevent clothing from becoming lost in the laundry.

Laundry requests residents refrain from taking more towels than needed to their rooms.

Conclusion

The group leader can conclude the training by pointing out that the resident council provides a forum for residents to:

- regain a sense of control and dignity;
- arrive at group priorities;
- meet their psychological need for empowerment;
- have constructive exchange of information between residents and staff; and
- encourage cooperation between staff and residents in building a fuller life in the facility.

ADVOCACY TIP:

Research indicates that a sense of control and the exercising of personal choices have a definite and positive role in sustaining life. Councils allow residents greater control and more choices in a situation where options are limited.

Structure

Although the structure of any organization is important to its success, there is not a right or wrong way to organize a resident council. Rather, the characteristics of the facility and its residents will affect the type of structure chosen.

The type of organization can range from a highly structured council with bylaws, officers, and committees to a group that meets informally with a staff person to discuss facility life. Regardless of the complexity of the organizational structure, it is crucial that the council meet the needs of the residents.

The following models are basic ideas which may be explored and adapted as your council takes shape.

No single organizational model is recommended. Whatever model is used, make sure it is flexible enough to allow changes when necessary.

- The council is directed by a set of elected officers, generally a president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer, and staff adviser.
- Meetings are monthly, with a planned agenda allowing residents a chance to make suggestions and participate in decision making.
- Officers and the staff adviser make up an Executive Committee which plans meetings and provides the leadership to assure the council meets the needs of residents and fulfills its purpose.
- Committees are organized as needed to address the concerns identified by the council.

Town Meeting Model

This type of council tends to work better in smaller facilities and usually has the following traits:

- Each resident is considered a member of the council and is encouraged to attend meetings.

Representative Model

This model is often preferred in large facilities where the town meeting model may be impractical due to the large number of residents attending meetings. The council is made up of elected or recruited representatives from various areas of the facility, such as floors or wings.

The representatives may be responsible for:

- participating in executive committee meetings to plan agendas;
- knowing the concerns and wishes of the residents they represent and speaking on their behalf at meetings;
- informing new residents of the council's existence and function; and
- reporting back to those they represent.

The representative model is generally characterized by the fact that only designated representatives attend council meetings. However, the following ideas can encourage participation of all residents.

- Have an open meeting for all residents every few months.
- Have a more formal agenda for open meetings, with an educational program or speaker.
- Encourage residents to discuss their concerns with their representative.
- Encourage participation in the election of council officers and representatives.

- Encourage participation in various committees, with elected representatives acting as chairpersons.

Committee Model

Facilities using this type of organization elect or appoint several residents to serve on a committee that functions in ways similar to the representative model.

The committee meets regularly, usually with a designated staff person to discuss ideas and concerns that have been identified. Each committee member acts as the chairperson for a standing committee, which works with the appropriate department head to resolve issues. The committee reports to residents on their activities through newsletters, posting of the minutes, or general meetings.

ADVOCACY TIP:

Use elements of any of the models listed to design a council that meets the needs of your facility. The council may end up being totally different from any other you have encountered and should change over time.

Council Officers and Leaders

The ideal organizational plan provides for leadership to be in the hands of residents. The staff adviser is an enabler, not a director of the council.

Regardless of which organizational model is used, officers are important to the effective operation of the council. As with everything else, adaptations of these officers may need to be made to meet the needs of a particular council.

The following is a list of typical officers and their duties:

1. PRESIDENT/CHAIRPERSON

The president/chairperson generally works with the other officers and staff adviser to draw up the meeting agenda and lead the meeting. He/she will direct the meeting, follow along with the agenda, and ensure that all sides are heard in an orderly manner. Following the meeting, the president/chairperson will act as a liaison with the facility and provide follow-up on concerns before the next meeting.

2. VICE PRESIDENT

The traditional duty of the vice president is to fill in for the president if he/she is unable to fulfill leadership duties. This responsibility, however, could be filled by any other officer. For this reason, some councils do not have a vice president, while others give the vice president additional duties, such as chairmanship of a significant committee.

3. SECRETARY

The structure of the council should provide for keeping a record of the meetings. It is the responsibility of the secretary to make such a record, which includes taking notes at the meetings and seeing that this information is distributed to the appropriate people. In addition, the secretary should ensure proper notice of upcoming meetings is made.

4. TREASURER

The treasurer is responsible for keeping a record of council funds that are raised and spent. The treasurer then reports to the council on the status of the treasury. All council funds should be kept separate from other funds in the facility. The bookkeeper at the facility can provide assistance to the treasurer.

5. REPRESENTATIVES

Representatives to a resident council serve in much the same way as they do in state and federal governments, and represent the concerns of their constituents at meetings. They may be either elected or appointed.

In addition to attending regular council meetings, representatives may be responsible for holding mini-town meetings with their constituents. This gives all residents the ability to have input into the council process. If meetings are not held, representatives must devise an alternative method of learning resident needs and relaying information from council meetings back to all residents.

Councils using other organizational structures may use representatives in other ways. They may have representatives-at-large whose responsibilities include such activities as visiting room-bound residents to learn of concerns and, with permission, present them at council meetings.

6. STAFF ADVISER

Ideally, council leadership would always be in the hands of residents. In some facilities, however, this may not be practical or possible. At times, there will not be residents who are willing or able to assume leadership of the council. For this reason, it is important to have a staff person designated to serve as an adviser.

The staff person who will assist the resident council must be carefully chosen. He or she must be enthusiastic, knowledgeable, objective, persistent, and committed to the philosophy of the council.

The staff adviser must be able to function as an advocate for the residents while at the same time be able to work within the administrative procedures and constraints of the facility.

The staff adviser should act as an enabler, not a director of the council. He or she must be sensitive and creative in assisting the council to achieve its maximum level of independence, while resisting the temptation to take over. This can only be done by assessing and reassessing what the residents can do for themselves and providing appropriate staff support.

7. VOLUNTEERS

Some facilities may have volunteers who are willing to assist with a resident council. Such a volunteer must be specially recruited, trained, and supervised by the staff adviser.

This source of leadership has several advantages. A volunteer can focus on the council and the needs of its members. He or she can spend the time required to work with the council, freeing up the time of the facility staff. And finally, residents may feel

more comfortable presenting complaints to a non-staff leader. It is preferable that the volunteer not be a family member, as this might result in a conflict of interest.

ADVOCACY TIP:

In the event that staff or volunteer leadership is required, this arrangement should only be used as a temporary measure. It is important that the council always be looking for residents who can assume leadership roles.

Facilities may consult with their regional long-term care ombudsman for assistance with training of staff or volunteers leading the resident council.

ADVOCACY TIP:

Try to assure that the council has an appropriate panel of officers who will encourage others to participate in leadership roles. Try to avoid having one or two residents who feel they must take all the responsibility for the council.

Committees

Many of the objectives of the residents council can best be accomplished through the work of organized groups or committees of residents.

Not only can organized committees accomplish more for residents, committee membership provides opportunities for more residents to be involved and use their talents. This in turn leads to a sense of accomplishment, enhanced self-esteem, and a feeling of helping others.

Committees can either be standing (permanent) or ad hoc (temporary) and vary in size from two to six members, depending on the work to be done. Council bylaws should specify all standing committees and provide for the formation of ad hoc committees.

A committee should exist only so long as it serves a purpose. Nothing does more to discourage resident participation than asking them to do something that makes no difference in their lives. Therefore, committees should exist only when the issue being addressed is of importance to the residents and/or takes up an inordinate amount of time at resident council meetings and needs additional effort.

The following are examples of typical council committees and their responsibilities. They may be standing or ad hoc committees.

Food Committee

Members may survey residents for their food likes and dislikes; meet with residents to hear complaints and suggestions; meet with the dietitian to make menu suggestions; plan resident activities involving food; or act as a taste panel.

Birthday Committee

Members work with staff to provide recognition to residents on their birthdays.

This may include hanging a sign on their door, giving a card, helping with a party, or simply leading a group of residents in singing "Happy Birthday."

A committee should exist only so long as it serves a purpose.

Spiritual Committee

Members work with clergy to plan spiritual programs for residents. This could include reading devotions to residents who so desire, introducing clergy at services, or acting as liaison to community churches who provide services to facility residents.

Grievance Committee

This committee can help prevent council meetings from becoming “gripe sessions.” It listens to concerns and provides an opportunity for discussion before the full council meets. For residents who wish to remain anonymous, a suggestion box could be maintained by the committee.

Personal Care Committee

Members observe general care for residents who cannot speak for themselves. This committee could be very helpful in addressing chronic complaints such as the length of time it takes to answer call lights.

Activities Committee

Members work with activities staff to plan and set up recreational programs. This committee could suggest new ideas or help plan special parties; help review and evaluate programs; and lead activities at times activity staff may not be available.

Sunshine Committee

Members keep track of those who are ill or hospitalized. They may send cards and

support to families who have lost a loved one. In fulfilling their function, these committee members pay special attention to residents who have no family.

Welcoming Committee

This committee greets new residents when they are admitted. They may introduce the new residents to others, give them a tour, and encourage them to participate in activities. They will also explain the purpose of the resident council and give an invitation to attend the next meeting. If they accept, the committee member will escort the new member to the meeting and introduce them.

Volunteer Service Committee

This committee works with staff to arrange for residents who would like to have volunteer opportunities in the facility. They may also work to facilitate efforts with agencies outside the facility such as United Way, Salvation Army, American Cancer Society, etc. Volunteers coming into the facility, as well as residents going outside the facility, keep residents connected to their communities.

Resident Rights Committee

Missouri law requires facilities to make an on going effort to help residents know and exercise their rights. This committee could be used to publicize, promote and monitor resident rights in the facility. The committee could make resident rights presentations to residents, staff and family members

along with serving as a liaison for other residents when they encounter questions about rights.

Other Information

These suggestions cover only a few of the committees that could be organized. Many others exist in councils and reflect the needs and interests of the residents.

The more broad based the participation in the council, the more successful it will be. When staffing committees, think of all residents as potential members. Residents who have been reluctant to take an office may be interested in serving on a committee. Committees may have special appeal because they are small and focus on a specific topic.

ADVOCACY TIP:

Leadership of all committees should be resident based. However, it may be necessary to have a staff person involved at various times. The staff member must be supportive and available to assist when needed and requested.

Council Bylaws

Council bylaws are written guidelines by which the group operates. Whether the council has a formal or informal structure, it is important to have some guidelines to give direction. The direction should be established early in the organizational process.

It is not necessary for the bylaws to be complex nor take a lot of time to compose. What is most important is that they are written in clear, simple language with each section being short and containing only one idea.

Bylaws usually contain the following sections:

- the name of the group;
- the purpose of the group;
- when and how meetings are to be conducted;
- membership criteria;
- officers titles, responsibilities, and term of office;
- nomination and election procedures;

- criteria for replacing an officer or representatives who can no longer serve;
- names and functions of standing committees;
- criteria for choosing residents to serve on committees;
- management of funds; and
- procedure for amending bylaws.

After proposed bylaws are written, council members should have time to study them carefully and offer suggestions before voting on them.

Bylaws should be simple yet complete enough to give needed direction to the council.

From time to time, it will be necessary to make changes to the bylaws. Provisions for amending the bylaws must be clearly spelled out.

The amending article should indicate:

- who may originate amendments;
- how the amending may be done;
- the time required for publicizing and studying proposed amendments;
- what kind of approval is needed to ratify an amendment (for example, 2/3 majority, simple majority, etc.); and
- when new amendments will become effective.

On the following page is a sample bylaws, provided as a guide to writing your own. Add to these, change them, and personalize them to reflect your council's purpose and function. Be sure to include whatever is appropriate for your council.

Sample Bylaws

I. Name

The name of the organization shall be __(name of council)__.

II. Purpose

The purpose of the __(name of council)__ is to:

- A. give residents greater participation in affairs within the facility;
- B. suggest improvements and help the administration provide better programs, surroundings, and services;
- C. promote friendship and understanding among residents; and
- D. provide and receive necessary information for the benefit of all residents.

III. Membership

Every resident of __(name of facility)__ becomes a member of the council upon admission to the facility. Every member of the council shall be given the opportunity to vote. *(If a representative structure is used, specify how that structure works.)*

IV. Officers and Their Duties

Officers of the council shall be elected every *(period of time, such as yearly, every six months, etc.)* and include:

- President - shall preside over all meetings;
- Vice-President - presides in the absence of the president;
- Secretary - records and maintains the minutes of each meeting; and
- Treasurer - responsible for all financial business of the council.

In the event that an officer becomes unable to fulfill his or her duties, a special election will be held at the next regularly scheduled council meeting.

V. Committees

The council shall have an Executive Committee made up of _____ members who will serve for *(period of time)*. The members of the executive committee will include: *(list of who will be included)*.

Other standing committees are: *(examples - grievance, welcoming, etc.)*.

Each standing committee will have _____ members who will serve for *(period of time)*.

Temporary committees can be established by appointment on an as needed basis.

VI. Elections

Elections of *(officers/representatives and committee members)* shall be held every *(month of elections)*. The elections will be conducted using written ballots listing nominations for each office. Nominations will be made at the meeting prior to the election.

VII. Meetings

Meetings will be held every *(specify day/month/time)*. *(If a representative form of organization is used, bylaws should also include:* An open meeting for all residents will be held on *__(day/month/time)__)*. Additional meetings may be called as needed and when authorized by the Executive Committee.

VIII. Amendments

Amendments may be made to these bylaws at any regular or special meeting of the council, by a 2/3 vote, providing suggested changes have been read at the previous meeting. Amendments will go into effect in seven (7) days.

IX. Rules of Order

Each general meeting will follow the agenda as prepared by the Executive Committee. Robert's Rules of Order will be followed unless the council wishes to change or add to the rules to suit the wishes of the majority.

Identifying Obstacles

Regardless of how carefully a resident council is planned, and how well it is supported by residents and staff, there may be obstacles to implementing it.

The most common obstacle is low resident participation. This can be attributed to many factors. Residents may be bedfast, mentally impaired, or otherwise unable or unwilling to attend meetings. If only a handful of residents participate in the council, the representative model will work best. Address the issues that are important to those in attendance. Those same issues may be of concern to other residents. Their efforts will benefit all residents and encourage participation of others.

Residents may be unaware of how the council can help them. As new residents come into the facility, and current residents

become more adjusted to their new surroundings, they can be educated on the purpose, functions and importance of the council. A reminder prior to the council meeting may also be necessary. Encouragement to participate can assist residents in gaining a sense of control and possibly reduce their vulnerability to depression and low self-esteem.

It is often difficult to find residents willing or able to take on leadership roles. There are several reasons for this dilemma. Residents may feel that they lack the skills or knowledge necessary to perform the role they are being asked to fulfill. Explain the duties in detail using clear, simple language. Some may think that they are not physically able to participate. Make sure that residents who use wheelchairs or gerichairs are assured of staff assistance in getting to the meeting place on time. Other residents just may not be willing to commit the time to the council, while some others may fear retaliation from the staff if they take on the leadership role.

Finally, an obstacle may be the perception of or actual lack of facility support. If the administrator does not support the idea of a resident council, his/her reluctance may trickle down to other staff. This may result

**See obstacles,
whatever they may be,
merely as challenges
to be overcome and then look
for ways to overcome them!!**

in the staff not considering it important enough to spend time assisting residents in getting to the meetings; not reminding residents of meetings, and not respecting the work of the council. A lack of support can often be discouraging, thus stifling a residents council. It is always important for the administrator to actively and openly support the council.

Remember, as obstacles are identified, activities need to be planned for dealing with them. For example, providing education may increase resident willingness to participate in leadership roles.

If the resident has never been involved in a community group before, he/she may be afraid to take on this new role out of fear they will not know what to do.

Another suggestion for improving resident participation is redefining officer roles to encourage participation. Potential officers may be more willing to participate if they know there are others who can substitute for them in case they become ill or incapacitated.

ADVOCACY TIP:

It may be necessary to form a family council that will compliment the resident council to assure that all residents needs and concerns are brought to the attention of the facility and addressed.

Take time to identify the real reasons behind the council's ineffectiveness. Obstacles can usually be addressed with some creative thinking.

Conducting Effective Meetings

Whether a small executive committee meeting or a town meeting where all residents in the facility are invited, “the meeting” is a very important council activity.

Many think that conducting a good meeting is the most important activity of the council. Others would consider a council’s effectiveness based on high attendance. Still others would not consider the council effective unless significant decisions were made at each meeting.

While council members may disagree on which activity is the most important, all would agree that the council should conduct effective and productive meetings, with proper attention and time devoted to ensuring this is accomplished. Good meetings do not just happen. They are planned and certain details need to be addressed in that planning.

First, formulate an agenda. Although it takes a bit of prior planning, a well-thought out agenda is essential to an orderly, productive meeting. Agendas should be prepared by the Executive Committee with consultation from the staff.

An effective agenda will use a standard, written format that is concise, well organized and structured to encourage discussion. A large-print copy should be available to each person attending the meeting so they can easily follow along.

After developing the agenda, promote the meeting. Post the scheduled time, location, and agenda of the meeting a few days before it is to occur. Take advantage of other methods used by the facility to inform residents of activities: the activity calendar, flyers, invitations, word-of-mouth, or a

monthly newsletter.

Meanwhile, make adequate room arrangements.

The key to conducting an effective meeting lies in advance planning.

Every effort should be made to see that the surroundings are conducive to good communication between those attending the meeting. Pay attention to the following details:

- Make sure the room is a comfortable temperature and well-ventilated.
- Assure the room is well lit.

- Make sure that the room is not so noisy that it is difficult for residents to hear. If necessary, provide a microphone with a long cord that allows people to move around the room. Ask staff to avoid using the overhead loud speaker system during the meeting.
- Assure the space affords residents as much privacy and freedom from distractions as possible.
- Assure there are enough comfortable chairs for all residents who need one.

Once the meeting has begun, try to keep it on schedule. As much as possible, start and end on time. The appropriate length of time to schedule for the meeting varies depending on the attention span, physical condition, and concerns of those in attendance. A good rule of thumb is to quit while there is still interest and energy, rather than to continue beyond the council members' attention and energy span. Try to keep the conversation moving ahead, so that dialogue does not get cut off just because time is up. In addition to keeping the meeting on schedule, it is important to maintain a comfortable atmosphere. Members should know one another, perhaps have introductions prior to each meeting. Members need to be reminded what the council is and what is supposed to happen at the meetings. Ask questions to encourage discussion. Be

prepared to deal with a resident who tries to monopolize the meeting with his/her personal concerns that are not appropriate for the group meeting.

Plan a social time after the meeting with special refreshments for those who attended. This time after the meeting can serve as an incentive to participate if a variety of special and "out of the ordinary" activities are planned.

ADVOCACY TIP:

Remind staff not to be disrespectful of residents' autonomy by interrupting the meeting for blood pressures, medications, baths, naps, etc. Residents should only be taken out of the meeting if they request it.

ADVOCACY TIP:

The interpretive guidelines for F243 of the federal regulations states that staff should only attend residents' council meetings if requested. Uninvited staff attendance may be intimidating to residents and inhibit them from expressing their concerns.

Council Agendas

Planning and preparing an agenda is an essential first step in conducting an effective meeting. The staff adviser may assist, but the executive committee or council officers should provide the majority of input into what is included on the agenda. Filling in the time is generally not a difficulty. Rather, the problem may be deciding which of the many items needing to be discussed will fit into the allotted time. In the decision making process, it is important not to include more items on the agenda than can be realistically dealt with in the time available.

Some items should be routine in every agenda. These items include reviewing the minutes of the previous meeting, old business, requests from the suggestion box, and any new business the council may have.

The agenda needs to be completed a few days ahead of time to assure all necessary individuals can be invited.

Generally, agendas follow this pattern:

1. OPENING ACTIVITY

All participants should receive a warm welcome. Introductions should be made, especially for new residents. Some

A written agenda is important because it helps to keep the participants organized and focused during the meeting.

councils do a roll call or wear name tags to help residents become acquainted. The purpose of the council and the reasons for the meeting are reviewed.

2. READ THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

This helps to remind residents of what happened at the last meeting.

3. RECEIVE REPORTS

If the council has representatives, each should have a few minutes to discuss the needs, concerns, and activities of the residents they represent.

If the council has committees that deal with some of the more in-depth concerns, they should also have a few minutes to review their activities. Present a treasurer's report, if available.

4. UNFINISHED/OLD BUSINESS

Review the business that was unfinished at the previous meeting. Discuss actions that have been taken since the meeting and whether the issue has been resolved. Publicize successes, but be honest about cases where the issue cannot be resolved. Perhaps the appropriate staff could be invited to give a thorough explanation.

5. NEW BUSINESS

The council should be an active organization with new concerns and ideas being brought up on a regular basis.

6. GUEST SPEAKERS

Some councils regularly invite guest speakers to their meetings. The speaker can come from inside or outside the facility. If a speaker is invited, he/she takes time from the other items on the agenda. This may limit the time available to discuss other issues. It may be necessary to alternate between meetings with speakers and meetings with the focus on resident input.

7. RESIDENT CONCERNS

In order for the meeting to be concluded in a reasonable time frame, it may be necessary to discuss only general concerns at the meeting. If residents have concerns that are specific only to them, each individual may need to be referred to the grievance committee, the social services department, the Long-Term Care Ombudsman, or others with responsibility for responding to resident concerns.

8. FACILITY NEWS

Department heads should ask to be put on the agenda if they have any information or news to share. It would be a nice gesture to introduce new staff members to the group.

9. SOCIAL TIME

Always plan for refreshments and a social activity following the meetings. This allows residents time to wind down after the meeting and serves as a thank you for attending.

10. PROGRAM IDEAS

Ideas for meaningful speakers, education, or special programs should be no problem for those planning the council agenda. To generate ideas, look at the purpose of the council. This should suggest several topics which can be explored. Ideas may include:

- Involving Residents More Fully in the Life of the Facility

Use the council as a place to get an accurate view of all aspects of life in the facility. Programs could include topics like the function of each department and how it contributes to the facility. Invite each department head to present a program. Have them explain to residents about staff responsibilities, define reasonable explanations, and what residents can do to help the staff provide better service.

- Self-Advocacy Education

Identify problems that residents might experience. Provide information and possible solutions. These may be hypothetical problems or real ones from the suggestion box, the grievance committee, or previous council minutes.

Identify resource people who can help with the issues being discussed. This could be the ombudsman, a department head, a Department of Health and Senior Services representative, etc. Teach residents how to use these resources as they work through the facility's grievance procedure to solve their own problems or concerns.

- Informing Residents of Their Rights

The long-term care facility is responsible under Missouri law for informing residents of their rights and assuring their implementation. The council can be a place where residents learn about their rights. This can be done through presentations by staff, ombudsmen, or others. Be sure to have copies of Resident Rights available to distribute at the meeting.

- Informing Residents of Facility Issues

If there are to be any major changes in facility procedures, residents should be informed and their cooperation sought. The council is a good forum for this. The council is also a good forum for outside agencies to inform residents about the services they provide to the facility. This could include the ombudsman, pharmacist, dentist, therapist, surveyors, etc.

- Keeping Residents Involved in the Community

Before an election, local candidates could be invited to share their position on issues. The council might ask an attorney to speak on "Advance Directives" and invite the public to attend. The council could also plan a holiday party for the staff's children.

- Setting a Council Agenda

Residents should be surveyed to see what topics or issues they would like the council to address, as well as any activities they would like to see the council undertake.

ADVOCACY TIP:

Posting an agenda several days in advance of the council meeting could help to increase attendance. A resident would know when a topic of particular interest to him or her was going to be discussed. Staff members could also encourage those residents to attend.

Meeting Minutes

An accurate record should be made of all happenings at each council meeting. They not only serve as a record of who attended, but also the business transacted. Minutes provide a record for those who did not attend so they can know what took place. Minutes can also act as a record of the facility's actions in response to the concerns of the council.

The secretary takes the minutes or designates someone to do it in his or her place.

TIPS FOR THE PERSON TAKING THE MINUTES

- Minutes should be brief, while giving a complete description of activity.
- Minutes must be legible and understandable enough for anyone to read.
- Minutes should contain:
 - the name of the person presiding;
 - members present;
 - who took the minutes;
 - date and time of the meeting;
 - all items discussed, actions taken; and
 - date and time of next meeting.

A standard form could be devised that would make the collection of all necessary information easier.

Minutes should be typed and copies made for distribution. The typing can be done by residents, a volunteer, or facility staff.

Distribution can become expensive if not done with some thought. It would be ideal if every resident and staff person in the facility received a copy. In the event this is not reasonable, minutes could be posted in several locations within the facility: employee break room, reception area and bulletin boards, for example. For residents who are unable to read independently, someone should offer to read the minutes to them if they so desire.

It is important that the administrator and all department heads receive their own copies of the minutes. They can then share the information with the staff they supervise.

Families and other interested parties should also be informed about what goes on in the council. A complete copy of the minutes can be mailed out or a synopsis of the minutes could be included in a facility newsletter. A newsletter format would allow the minutes to be presented in a more attractive and readable format.

ADVOCACY TIP:

For residents who use wheelchairs for mobility, a bulletin board hung lower on the wall allows easier access than one hung at eyelevel for individuals who can stand.

Parliamentary Procedure

Basic parliamentary procedure should be used in conducting resident council meetings. Parliamentary procedures are a set of rules that helps a group run meetings in an organized, efficient manner. These rules provide a structure for including everyone's opinion in order to produce decisions based on majority opinion.

Parliamentary procedure is based on the premise that:

- meetings should be conducted in an orderly way with one question being considered at a time;
- everyone is equal and all who wish should have an equal opportunity to speak; and
- an open atmosphere exists for the expression of minority opinions but that majority opinion, once voted on, prevails.

Basic parliamentary procedure provides four steps to determining the majority opinion:

1. Making a Motion

During meetings, issues may arise that draw comments from several persons. When a subject sparks sufficient interest from participants, either the leader will ask if the group wishes to take any action or some member of the group will voluntarily make a motion.

A motion is usually made by simply stating, "I move that...." The leader should then restate the motion clearly so that all understand what is being proposed.

2. Seconding the Motion

In order for the council to consider the motion, someone must second the motion. This can be done by simply stating, "I second the motion."

3. Discussing the Motion

A discussion of the motion should be conducted. All who wish to have input should be allowed to do so. When the issue has been thoroughly discussed, the leader will call for a vote to be taken.

4. Voting on the Motion

The vote can be taken orally, through a show of hands, or by secret ballot. The vote is counted and the leader announces the outcome to the group. The vote is then recorded in the minutes.

Voting is important and should be used often. It emphasizes the active participation of residents in the activities of the council.

Generally, the leader participates in the discussion, but does not vote unless there is a tie. In such an event, the leader will vote to break the tie.

Council meetings should be conducted in an orderly way, but care must be taken to assure that adherence to parliamentary procedure does not stifle the atmosphere of the meeting. Residents must feel free to express themselves.

If residents stray off the subject, gently lead them back to the discussion at hand. Suggest that they address the topic later in the meeting if time allows or put it on the agenda for the next meeting.

A simple training for council officers and members will assure that all have a basic understanding of parliamentary procedure. This helps them to feel comfortable during the meeting and increases verbal contributions.

ADVOCACY TIP:

Create a “parking lot” for issues that need to be brought up at a later time. This ensures that ideas are not dropped.

Encouraging Participation

Getting residents to participate will top almost any list of problems encountered in providing an effective resident council.

This difficulty has been identified by everyone involved - staff, volunteers, and residents.

Many reasons are given for this problem. Some are easily addressed and eliminated, while others are rooted in the characteristics of residents living in the facility - facts of life which must be accepted.

An assessment to determine what motivates your residents is the starting point to encouraging greater council participation.

Some reasons for low participation have already been identified in this manual. In trying to identify other factors affecting participation, staff and council leaders should examine their own attitude. Low participation may be the result of leaders assuming that residents cannot participate and therefore do not appropriately assist or make provisions for participation.

If many residents in the facility do not have the mental or physical ability to participate, perhaps the structure of the resident council could be modified to better meet the needs of the residents. Make sure the council is based on a realistic philosophy, has attainable goals, and a workable organizational format.

When a proper foundation has been laid, there are many things that can be done to encourage participation. The most basic thing leaders can do is understand what motivates residents to participate. Three motives are identified in the book, *Resident Councils in Action* by the Advocacy Center for Long-Term Care, as being necessary before there will be any resident action. These are:

1. SELF-INTEREST

Resident council attendance may be sparked by self-interest. One resident has a problem she hopes can be solved: it is too crowded in the lounge outside the dining room just before dinner. Another is concerned that there is no railing near the sidewalk to help residents keep their footing. Yet another resident would like to see a cart that moves from room to room selling affordable goodies and toiletries.

These are the residents' own reasons for coming to the council, not the administrator's nor staff adviser's reasons. Self-interest is stronger than any poke, prod, or push.

2. RESULTS

Luring residents to their first council meeting is one thing, getting them to return is another. Results keep a person coming back to council meetings. To put it simply, residents will not come to meeting after meeting just to have a cup of coffee. They will return if they view the council as a forum for resolving concerns, implementing new ideas, and sharing suggestions. Residents are more likely to return if they feel their ideas and suggestions are given serious consideration.

3. RECOGNITION

People thirst for recognition. It is not enough to be accepted for who we are or appreciated for what we do. We need to be praised and made to feel important.

Few people in a facility get recognition for their activities or work. Numerous things occur in a council as a direct result of one individual's efforts or a committee's efforts. These people deserve public recognition and receiving it will serve as an inducement for continued participation in the council. If we expect residents to keep coming back to council meetings, those who organize and plan for the meetings must keep these

motivators in mind as they plan.

Some techniques which council leaders may find helpful in encouraging and motivating residents to become involved in the council include:

● INFORM NEW RESIDENTS

New residents should be informed about the council when they first move in. Many facilities provide new residents with an orientation packet. Make sure a description of the council is included.

A good council project might be to develop a short, simply written brochure that explains the purpose, gives meeting date, time, and place and lists some past achievements of the group.

● INVITE NEW RESIDENTS

Make a special effort to invite new residents to participate in the council. Each new resident should be visited by an active, knowledgeable member of the council. During this visit, the council member can explain the purpose of the council and invite and encourage the new resident to become involved. The council member will also be learning about the new resident's interests and past experiences. This information could establish possible contributions the resident might make to the council. It would be helpful if the council member offered to accompany the new resident to the next council meeting.

These visits might also be made by a council committee. If there are no residents available to make the visits, the staff adviser or ombudsman volunteer should take the responsibility for contacting new residents.

- **HAVE A WELL-ESTABLISHED MEETING TIME AND PLACE**

Establish a meeting schedule and follow it. Continually moving the council meeting time or place suggests that the council is not a priority, it just has to fit in when and if there is time.

The council should be flexible enough to fit into the regular routine of the facility, but every effort should be made to maintain a regular meeting time and place, as specified in the bylaws.

- **PUBLICIZE ACTIVITIES**

If the council is organized on the town meeting model, every resident in the facility should receive notice of meetings. A visit may be appropriate to extend a personal invitation to new residents, or residents who have not attended for awhile.

The resident council should have its own bulletin board where information about the council can be posted. Ideally, materials on the bulletin board should be in large print and at eye-level both for those in wheelchairs and those who are ambulatory. Announcements over the facility public

address system, perhaps the day before and the day of the meeting, can remind residents of the meeting time and place, as well as publicize the program.

- **PROVIDE WELL-RUN MEETINGS**

See that meetings start on time and follow a written agenda. Plan for the visual and auditory limitations of the residents by providing a microphone with a long cord. Encourage all residents to contribute to the discussion. It helps to develop a procedure for dealing with personal concerns that are not related to the council's purpose.

- **PROVIDE APPROPRIATE FOLLOW-UP ON COUNCIL ACTIONS**

Make sure that all suggestions or complaints made to the council are taken to the administration for action. All issues should be taken seriously and all action taken or not taken should be reported to the council with an appropriate explanation.

- **RECOGNIZE RESIDENTS WHO PARTICIPATE IN THE COUNCIL**

Residents can be recognized by providing them with special name badges, plaques, or "spot light" articles in facility publications. Arranging for publicity in local newspapers during National Nursing Home Week or Resident Rights Week helps to spread the word outside the facility. Perhaps no greater compliment can be paid to a resident than to use his or her individual talents and experiences in council activities.

A resident who is a retired English teacher may be very willing to take and prepare minutes in a clear and concise manner. Knowing about residents will allow leaders to take advantage of their talents. And finally, residents can be recognized during the social time following the meeting.

ADVOCACY TIP:

Give council members more than just “token” responsibilities while at the same time not overwhelming them with expectations they cannot live up to.

- **INVOLVE AS MANY RESIDENTS AS POSSIBLE**

If the council is organized so that all residents in the facility are members, encourage everyone to attend meetings. If a representative model is used, set up committees and ad hoc groups to involve more residents.

- **PROVIDE ASSISTANCE TO THOSE WHO NEED HELP**

Staff or trained council members and volunteers may be willing to assist chair-bound residents to attend meetings.

Devise some way for bed or room-bound residents to be informed on council activities, and to have input into meetings.

- **IDENTIFY ISSUES OF INTEREST TO RESIDENTS**

Residents are more likely to be involved when the council is considering issues that are important to them. From time to time, survey residents to determine what topics they would like the council to consider.

- **ENCOURAGE RESIDENTS TO SEE THEMSELVES AS PARTNERS WITH FACILITY ADMINISTRATION**

Look for ways to help residents see that running a good facility is a two-way street and that they can share the responsibility with the staff.

ADVOCACY TIP:

When promoting council activities, it is crucial to remember that residents have a variety of physical and mental problems. To rely solely on one form of communication will serve to exclude many potential participants. A variety of means of communication must be worked out for announcing meetings & reporting on council activities and similar matters of interest. Make sure that these various means of communication reach everyone.

Council Evaluation

Conducting a periodic review and evaluation of the council is an important exercise and should include not only residents, but staff and volunteers as well. Each group will have a different perspective of what the council is doing and whether or not it is meeting its objectives.

An honest evaluation is beneficial for councils regardless of the stage of development or perceived effectiveness of the council.

A NEW COUNCIL

If the council has been organized within the past year, an evaluation should be made to determine its effectiveness. Do not wait until the council becomes ineffective before beginning to make necessary changes.

AN ESTABLISHED COUNCIL

Even if your council has been in operation for many years and is considered to be effective, it is a good idea to do periodic evaluations. Without periodic evaluations, effectiveness may be assumed whether the council meets only minimum objectives or acts as a dynamic organization.

Even though each resident group is unique, and what is considered effective or

ineffective varies widely, there are some general characteristics that are known to affect the success of councils.

Some common areas of weakness include:

1. lack of council leadership;
2. lack of resident participation;
3. the council is not seen to be making a difference in life at the facility; and
4. effectiveness is overly dependent on staff leadership.

Looking closely at your council will reveal its strengths and weaknesses. While there are many methods to do this, two examples follow. Whatever method is used, the results should provide valuable information for making improvements.

EXAMPLE 1

COMPARE YOUR COUNCIL WITH OTHERS

Exchanging visits with resident groups from nearby facilities is one method of evaluating your council. Much can be learned by sharing information and ideas with similar groups.

Choose a facility with about the same number of residents and level of care. Arrange for some of your residents and the council adviser to visit and observe the council in the other facility. The following questions can serve as a guide in comparing the two groups:

- How does the group conduct its meetings: who leads them, residents or staff?
- How does the group handle personal concerns brought up during the meetings?
- Do residents participate in discussions freely and fully?
- Is the group well structured or informal? Do you think the way they conduct the council is effective?
- Are all residents involved in each meeting or only representatives?
- Does its form of organization fit the facility and its residents? Why or why not?
- What projects have been undertaken? Would those projects be suitable in your facility?
- If the group has written bylaws, compare them with yours.
- Does the group or staff recognize those who participate regularly in the meetings? How is it done?
- What would you change or adapt for your group?

EXAMPLE 2

RESIDENT COUNCIL SELF-EVALUATION

Another effective way to evaluate your council is by answering questions related to council effectiveness. This form was adapted from one devised by the Advocacy Center for Long-Term Care. For best results, two distinct groups should complete the survey - a group of residents and a group of staff. To find an average score, total the scores of all evaluations completed and divide by the number of evaluations completed.

Circle the answer that most reflects your honest opinion.

A. How is your council organized?

1. Do you hold meetings at least once a month?
Yes No
2. Are your leaders chosen by residents?
Yes No
3. Do you have written purposes and bylaws?
Yes No
4. Do your meetings have planned agendas?
Yes No
5. Do all participants know what is on the agenda?
Yes No
6. Is a written record of meetings kept?
Yes No
7. Are the meeting minutes consistently posted or published?
Yes No

B. How do residents participate?

8. Are most of the alert residents in your facility aware of the council and its purposes?
Yes No
9. Is information about the council easily available?
Yes No
10. Are residents involved as much as they are able in leading or planning council meetings?
Yes No
11. Is there a core group of residents who attend the meetings?
Yes No
12. Do most residents who attend appear interested?
Yes No
13. Do residents who are willing to be involved receive recognition?
Yes No
14. Do residents feel they can speak up without fear of retaliation?
Yes No

C. How does staff participate?

15. Are all staff members aware of the existence and purpose of the council?
Yes No
16. Is information about the council given to staff?
Yes No
17. Has a specific staff person been assigned to work with the council?
Yes No
18. Would your council continue at its present level of activity if there were a change in staff?
Yes No

D. How does the administration participate?

19. Is the administration supportive of the council?
Yes No
20. Does the administration stay in close contact with the council?
Yes No
21. Are the council's recommendations given serious consideration by the administration?
Yes No
22. Does the administration seek the council's opinion before changing policies?
Yes No
23. Does the administration keep the council informed of changes in policies or regulations?
Yes No

E. How does the council encourage resident rights?

24. Does your facility have a written grievance procedure which involves the council?
Yes No
25. Is information about the council in your facility's handbook?
Yes No
26. Are problems or questions brought up at council meetings answered fairly with prompt follow-up?
Yes No
27. Are resident rights regularly discussed?
Yes No

F. How does your council provide opportunities for constructive involvement?

28. Is the council allowed to assist in choosing the types of activities and programs presented at the facility?
Yes No
29. Is the council involved in welcoming and/or orienting new residents and visitors?
Yes No
30. Does the council express concerns for residents at times such as birthdays or illness?
Yes No
31. Has the council been informed about the responsibilities of the various departments in the facility?
Yes No

32. Has the council had opportunities for input into menu planning for daily meals or special events?
Yes No
33. Has your council expressed an opinion to a source outside the facility, such as a public official or newspaper?
Yes No
34. Has your council been involved in sponsoring or planning a special event or activity for the facility?
Yes No
35. Is the council asked to participate in solving problems within the facility?
Yes No

G. Bonus Question (10 points)

36. Does your council have a positive effect on residents and staff in your facility?
Yes No

Totals _____ _____ _____
 Yes **No** **Bonus**

TOTAL POINTS _____

Give each YES answer 2 points. Give yourself a bonus of 10 points if you answered YES to question No. 36. There are a possible 80 points. A score over 58, indicates that your council is probably effective. A lower score may indicate problems or dissatisfaction, which the council would need to address.

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Available from the Missouri Long-Term Care
Ombudsman Program:

Family Guide to Effective Family Councils

Call **1-800-309-3282**

or visit

www.dhss.mo.gov/Ombudsman

Appendix

Resident/Family Councils in Missouri Survey Results - 1995

(based on percentage of total respondents)

Issues Discussed and Number of Times Discussed

Resident Councils		Family Councils	
Food Issues	141	Medicaid/Medicare Issues	10
Resident Rights	158	Feelings of Guilt	5
Laundry Issues	31	Changes at Facility	16
Programming	133	Questions and Concerns	34
Facility Departments	81	Alzheimers/Dementia	22
Quality of Life	25	Quality of Life	7
Policy Changes	27	Rights and Legal Issues	8
Smoking	7	Activities	19
Fund Raisers	11		
Guest Speakers	6		
Roommates/Living Issues	17		
Employee/Resident of Month	12		
Safety Issues	2		
Deaths	1		
Transportation	2		

Staff Member Responsible for Oversight of Councils

Resident Councils		Family Councils	
Activity Director	55%	Activity Director	10%
Social Service Director	20%	Social Service Director	55%
Activity & Social Service	18%	Administrator	18%
Other	7%	Social Service & Administrator	12%
		Nursing	4%
		Activity & Administrator	1%

Credits

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